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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Web Sales Tax Favored! ~ FTC Nabs Mrs. Fields! ~ NetHack Updated!
~ Open Season On Spammers ~ Feds Spying On Web? ~ MyPicoDos 3.0 Ready!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Mother Nature is still toying with us here in the upper-right hand corner of the country. After burying us with almost two feet of snow the week before, we had above-normal temperatures for the weekend. Naturally, we then got belted with the frigid temperatures again. I wish that she would make up her mind already! And as if to rub it in, I'm starting to get a bunch of catalogs in the mail from greeneries pushing their Spring seeds and bulbs!

It looks like things may be heading into a potential disaster for those internet users who do a lot of online shopping: sales taxes. Many states are keeping an eye on what California is considering doing to collect taxes on online sales; the state could set a precedent for the rest of the country. You know that this would probably not even be considered but for the economy's continued unstable condition these days. States are strapped for revenues. Rather than be fiscally responsible, go after the consumer even more! In-state enforcement of web sales taxes are one thing, but out-of-state consumers have always had the good fortune to not have to pay these taxes. And this goes well beyond internet sales; the same can be said for mail order. Throw them a bone, they'll take your leg! If this becomes a reality, I hope consumers cut back on their internet buying habits just to make a point. It may not be the Boston Tea Party, but it could very well be its online counterpart!

Until next time...

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New on TAMW: New Version of KCS

Hi All

The good DR (T) has approved of a version 4 KCS (Keyboard Controlled Sequencer) with PVG (programmable Variation Generator) and Master Editor. I have re-packaged the original version 4 to include these vital additions along

with Jeffery Raid Baker’s Tempo Master MPE. The PVG Docs are also available.

KCS also runs on PC under emulation using Steem.

http://tamw.atari-users.net/steem.htm

For those who have not heard what PVG is about, please explore the link section on the below page, as well as try it yourselves. Please go here for the info and download:

http://tamw.atari-users.net/omega.htm

Enjoy!

Tim Conrardy

New Atari Software Archive

An atari.org user has announced:

A New Atari software database site has been opened, The site has a clean easy to use search system and already has almost 100 items included with more added every day. You can also easily submit your own entries as well.

http://atari.darkspace.org.uk/

NetHack 3.4.1 Released

Adam Klobukowski has announced:

NetHack is one of the longest ever developed Rogue-like games (since 1985). New things in this release are mainly fixed bugs of previous release. Binaries for Atari 16/32bit (TOS/GEM) are available.

http://www.nethack.org/

MyPicoDos 3.0 Available

I just uploaded MyPicoDos 3.0 to my homepage

http://www.horus.com/~hias/atari/

MyPicoDos is a "game DOS" which can load COM/EXE, BIN and BAS files and it supports MyDOS subdirectories.

New in this version:
- support for SD and DD (hard-) disks from 720 up to 65535 sectors
  in DOS 2.x and MyDOS format

- MyPicoDos supports loading from D1: to D8:
- MyPicoDos is now GPL'ed and comes with full source code

so long,

Hias

Fading Twightlight Excerpt Seven

Anders Eriksson has announced:

Music from the Atari-scene is going in its seventh round. Listen to
over 400 tunes from the following Atari scene musicians:

-Akira / The Chaos Engine
-Beast / The Syndicate
-Blue Tiger / Spider
-Bummtschak
-Connor / The Naughty Bytes
-Tim Conrardy
-Crawdaddy / Chronicle
-Drus / Redlite
-Energy / The Chaos Engine
-Essence aka Anasazi / Imagina
-Fabounio
-FFT / NeXT
-Gargamel / Dead Hackers Society
-Goldy / Therapy
-Gozer / Flash^Kruz
-Greg / Aids^Bitbusters
-Gregfeel
-Gulligull / Dead Hackers Society
-Jean-Luc
-Jedi / Sector One
-Jora / Black Monolith Team
-LynXX
-Laurent Malet
-Pegase / Adrenaline
-Phoenix / The Chaos Engine
-Pinokio / Allegresse
-Paul Slocum
-Solo / New Generation^Apocalipse riders
-ST Mixes / PoSiTiViTy
-Thomas aka Split / New Beat Development
-Tinker / Teenage
-Zigo / EXA^Adrenaline^Arsenic^The Fat Mamoth

http://ft.tscc.de/

Computer Controller Cookbook

The team at AtariArchives.org is thrilled to announce that the full text
of the classic book _The Computer Controller Cookbook_ by Tom & Kelda
Riley is now online at:

http://www.atariarchives.org/ccc/

Published in 1983 by Creative Computing Press, this hard-to-find book shows how to build your own controllers for Apple // and Atari 8-bit computers.

Chapters include instructions for building an airplane wheel, sketch pad, race car steering wheel, foot pedals, sound-activated controller, and joysticks. There are also chapters on rebuilding paddles and joysticks, converters for using Atari joysticks on Apple computers (and vice versa), and more. Chapter 14 is an electronics tutorial that tells how to adapt the controllers for use on VIC-20, IBM PC, Radio Shack, and other computers.

This is the 11th classic computing book available at AtariArchives.org.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Mother Nature has been playing games with us again. It's one thing when we get a lot of snow here in the northeast, but Maryland?? Well, whether or not they want snow, they're getting it.

I'm not going to launch into a tirade about global warming and how it could be affecting us in ways we haven't even thought of yet. So far, I'm not convinced that the strange weather we've been having is anything other than a collection of freakish events.

I'm not going to belabor the point... especially since I don't think that any of us actually know what "the point" is yet. It's not that I'm an "ecology nut", or that I have some inside information about the way things are headed, but I do like to wonder about things. I find that, if you wonder enough, you're more likely to be prepared when something unexpected happens.

Well, I'm going to keep it short this week.... not as short as last week, but short. Let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Martin Tarenskeen asks about font editing:

"I'm looking for an editor for GDOS bitmap fonts. What should I look for?"

Harry Siseras tells Martin:

"Undoubtedly, Fontkit Plus v4.11 by Jeremy Hughes (who later wrote

Imagecopy). Unfortunately it was from the FaST Club, but I don’t know whether someone like Nick Harlow @ 16/32 may still have it to sell...

Provided with font converting utilities (from Calamus and Signum) and a font compression utility (Trimfont) it’ll do everything you could want."

Lonny Pursell adds:

"I have one made by Tom Hudson I think, perhaps it came with Degas Elite. I’m not sure, it’s been a long time since I used it."

Manfred Kitzbichler asks for info about his 1040:

"I recently acquired an Atari 1024STF which had been used at the local university. Unfortunately I don’t have a clue how to get it to work since it’s my first Atari ever.

When I switch it on nothing much happens, all I get is a plain white screen. I tried to make a TOS disk by using some tools and disk-images from the net but when I insert the disk the computer doesn’t respond in any way.

In order to find the possible cause for the machine’s rather antisocial behaviour I tried to have a look at its interior. Apparently someone had been tinkering with the poor thing, even though admittedly I don’t know what it is actually supposed to look like. Nevertheless I doubt that loose circuit boards and 68881 co-processors piggy-back mounted on the sockets of other chips are the usual Atari Inc. standard.

Anyway, can anybody tell me what to do to get a working computer form this mess ? I could of course tear out everything that looks suspicious to me but even if I make the right choices there will almost certainly remain some jumpers which are not set correctly. On the other hand if the white screen is just fine and the problem is the lack of software it would be a shame to remove the hardware
extension stuff. So, any suggestions ?"

Djordje Vucovic tells Manfred:

"If you identified a 68881 FPU it is probably mounted on top of the CPU- that could be the most logical place because it uses almost the complete CPU bus. As far as I know in any variant of the 68881 add-on it does not require any traces to be cut- the co-processor board should just sit on the bus parallel to everything else- and therefore can be safely removed if you like it so. On a more gentle approach, removing the -AS signal leading to the FPU board and tying the FPU-board side of that to +5V should completely disable the FPU- unless it is badly malfunctioning.

Btw. if the FPU is -ABOVE- the MC68000 CPU it could mean a cooling problem for the CPU; ventilation in a 1004 is not very good (no fan).

You should check that ROM/EPROM chips are in their sockets; there should be either 2 ROMs or 6 27C256 EPROMs- unless they tried to install TOS 2.06 in which case there should be two 27C010 or 27C1001 EPROMs. It could be a good idea to press a little the EPROMs (and all other non-soldered) chips into their sockets (so that they move just a little bit)- after many years pin contacts tend to become bad.

Also check that the floppy drive is connected properly. If the computer is near to functional there should be some floppy activity very soon

after power-on. But beware: unless there is some floppy in the drive, the computer takes more than one minute to show desktop on the screen. With -ANY- MS-DOS formatted 720KB floppy in the drive, it comes to life after several seconds."

Derryck Croker adds:

"No signs of disk activity? That's one of the first steps the OS goes through when it starts up. If you get that, it could be that you might need a driver of some sort for the hardware.

If you can find out something about its history, like was it working when last used, that might give you a clue.

There are no jumpers to be set in this computer, but it is quite possible that whatever mods were carried out also needed some PCB tracks to be cut.

If it were my machine I would be inclined to try and get it working with the mods, you would almost certainly have a better machine as a result."

Stephen Moss adds:

"Presumably the people you got it from made the modifications and therefore would be the best people to ask. You need to know what the modifications were for what the start up procedure is as the modifications may have changed it from the normal boot-up process. It's possible that they may have disabled or bypassed TOS."

Greg Goodwin jumps in and adds:

"Well, as you may guess, a white screen isn't what you are supposed to get. An Atari has a basic operating system in ROM, so you should get to the (usually green) desktop if no software is loaded.

The 1040STF has few (if any) jumpers. If you can provide some data as to what was done, we might me able to help. Otherwise, I'd start tearing out stuff."

Matthias Arndt asks about running MagiC on his Falcon:

"I finally got a Falcon030 with a VGA adaptor. It came with MagiC installed on the hard disk and it works pretty good. Now I have a few questions:

a) which programs exactly force the Falcon to boot into MagiC? There are a few programs in the AUTO folder. Especially one called magxboot.prg but disabling it, the machine will still boot MagiC. All I want is to setup a dualboot environment to run MagiC as the main OS but have the normal single-tasking TOS available as backup at boot time.

b) Is XBoot Falcon compatible? If yes, could it solve the problem above?

c) Can MagiC run applications in single-tasking mode like non-GEM games and demos intended for single-tasking OS?

d) Do I need to park the hard disk or can I simply switch off the Falcon like my normal ST?

e) Are there tools that will allow TOS console applications (namely .ttp and .tos ones) to run in a window?

f) Can I use STing without a modem but a null modem connected to my Linux box for networking?

g) How fast is the built-in serial port of the Falcon?

h) Can I display all video modes on my VGA display?"

Derryck Croker tells Matthias:

"a) It is indeed magxboot.prg, this is reset-proof and the only way to boot into TOS after you've loaded MagiC is to perform a cold start/boot.

b) XBoot will work with MagiC as you suggest. You must ensure that XBoot runs first in your Auto folder. There might be an issue though, as it seems that XBoot is packed and some versions don't unpack properly at run-time. I'm hazy on this, so take a look at the Google news archives as this was covered some time in the past along with some year 2000 problems IIRC.

c) You can run programs in single-tasking mode, but that's no guarantee that all your progs will work especially games and demos.

d) Under single TOS just switch off, under MagiC use the Shutdown option.

e) VT52 is the supplied app for MagiC, no idea about TOS.

f) I believe so. Look in Google for some info?

g) 115200 is absolute tops, half that for better reliability. You need HSModem installed.

h) Higher resolutions and colour planes lead to slower operation and more flickering.

An accelerator together with a SCSI patch mod. should be on your shopping list, can anyone suggest a source for Falcon speeders?"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Gains Online Gaming Push!
Feds Seize Bootlegger Site!
EA Wins Top Awards! Sega To Sell?
And much more!

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Sony Unit to Support Butterfly.Net Gaming Grid

Sony Corp.'s video game arm will provide game developers with the technology they need to access a giant online gaming computing network run by private start-up Butterfly.net Inc., the companies said on Thursday.

Butterfly.net, based in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, announced last year that it had signed a deal for International Business Machines Corp. to build a computer network that uses software to shift computing resources as needed, allowing it to support a million players or more.

Analysts said that Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.'s agreement to provide developers with the tools and software that work with Butterfly.net may make it cheaper and easier for game developers to create and support online games.

Online games enable users to play against other gamers in their respective homes. The games are written by developers who either free-lance or work for companies like Electronic Arts Inc. and THQ Inc.

"It's really expensive to develop a network because you've got to get the T1 (digital carrier) line, you've got to run the server and you've got to maintain the server even after you've developed the game," said Charlene Li, an analyst with Forrester Research.

"Most of the game developers are used to saying 'I'm going to create the game and then after I'm done shipping that to the public I want to just move onto the next game'," she said.

While online gaming is viewed as having significant potential in the longer-term, it has not taken off significantly because of slow consumer broadband adoption and still-developing business models, among other reasons.

Though Sony and Microsoft Corp., which makes the Xbox, have both claimed early success for their online gaming efforts, their percentage of online users is a small fraction of their installed base.

For instance, Japan's Sony has shipped 50 million PlayStation 2 units and has sold 400,000 network adapters, which allow users to play games online.

Some publishers have shied from Microsoft's strategy of centralizing access and billing, while Sony's system, which leaves back-end operations to the publisher, has been seen as too expensive for some publishers to attempt.

The computing network, or grid, is built with computer servers from Armonk, New York-based IBM. The servers run IBM's integration and database software and are located in two IBM data centers. They also run the Linux operating system, which is an open source system that is free to be copied and modified.

Butterfly.net Chief Executive David Levine said there are currently nine games being tested on the grid and that he expects the first game to go live in the second quarter of 2004.

Sega Stock Jumps on Reported Microsoft, EA Bids

Shares in Japanese video game maker Sega Corp soared on Friday after a media report that Microsoft Corp and top U.S. game publisher Electronic Arts Inc were considering billion-dollar takeover bids for the company.

The Asian Wall Street Journal said the U.S. companies wanted to buy all or part of Sega, which is already involved in merger discussions with fellow Japanese game maker Sammy Corp.

The report sparked a buying spree for shares in Sega, which had a market capitalization of 129.4 billion yen as of Friday.

The Journal, quoting people familiar with the situation, said Microsoft and EA were separately exploring the possibility of buying all or part of Sega, famous for its "Sonic the Hedgehog" character, but had yet to hold formal talks.

The sources were quoted as saying no deal was imminent.

The news emerged two weeks after Sega, Japan’s largest game arcade operator, said it would merge with Sammy Corp, the country’s largest maker of pinball-style ’pachinko’ game machines, and would abandon plans to restructure on its own.

The paper said either U.S. company could emerge as struggling Sega’s "white knight," pulling it away from a merger plan that appears rife with difficulties and faces internal opposition.

Analysts said the report appeared to be speculative but it came amid mounting uncertainty over the fate of the merger deal.

Investors in the two Japanese firms have given a thumbs down to the merger plan, sending shares in both to all-time lows.

"Many investors and employees at Sega believe Sammy is not an appropriate partner and that the merger would bring little benefit to Sega. Now, it is not sure if the deal will go through," Morgan Stanley analyst Shunji Yamashina said.

Yamashina said he would not be surprised if Microsoft bid for Sega since it wants to beef up it game line-up for its Xbox console which in Japan lags behind competitors like Sony Corp’s PlayStation 2 and Nintendo Co Ltd’s GameCube.

For EA, such a deal would be less attractive because it makes games similar to Sega’s, Yamashina said.

The newspaper said Microsoft had asked at least one U.S. investment bank to investigate ways to buy all or part of Sega.

It said EA had approached Japanese game makers in recent weeks about launching a joint bid for Sega.

Sega said it had not received any offers.

Officials at the Japanese units of Microsoft and EA declined to comment on the report, but a Microsoft spokesman said chairman Bill Gates had not met with Sega when he visited Tokyo this week.

Analysts said Microsoft would have to convince Sega’s biggest shareholder, CSK Corp, before any deal went ahead.

CSK, an information services provider, holds a 22.3 percent stake in Sega and is thought have played a big role in arranging the deal with financially sound Sammy.

Sega has been hurt by the disappointing performance of its consumer videogame operations, especially in the United States, and its shares have lost nearly 70 percent of their value since the end of last March.

Sega reduced its net profit forecast by 90 percent to 50 million yen ($425,000) for the year to March early this month.

The company is expected to announce as early as Friday a reorganization of its U.S. operations that will shed 20 percent of its work force of 450, the Journal said.

The cuts are part of a global restructuring that could lead to additional layoffs around the world, the paper said.

EA Cleans Up at Video Game Industry Award Show

A computer game that allows players to simulate battles from World War II made No. 1 independent video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc.the runaway winner at an industry awards show Thursday night.

EA took 13 of 30 honors, including Game of the Year for the PC game "Battlefield 1942," which allows players to relive classic World War II battles in North Africa, Guadalcanal and Normandy, operating 35 simulated "machines of war" including tanks, fighter planes and jeeps.

The game also won three other awards, including nods for innovation and online play for Redwood City, California-based EA at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences’ 6th Annual Interactive Entertainment Awards in Las Vegas.

Coming in behind EA was Japanese game publisher and hardware maker Nintendo Co. Ltd. with seven awards, including three for the game "Animal Crossing" for its GameCube machine.

Although the major Hollywood awards, such as the Oscars, can boost a movie’s take at the box office and in video, there is no evidence yet that the upstart game awards provide a similar lift to sales.

Even so, the $30-billion game industry has been moving itself toward more of a Hollywood model in recent years, signing big deals for games based on movies and recruiting movie industry talent, in part with the promise of more public recognition.

Nintendo’s "Metroid Prime," which had 10 nominations at the show and was widely ranked as the best video game of 2002 by the trade press, took only one award Thursday, in the category of first-person action games.

The best-selling video game of 2002, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.’s "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," had six nominations and won one award, in the category of action-adventure games for consoles.

"Vice City," a criminal adventure condemned by some for its portrayals of violence against women and others, has sold more than 8.5 million units worldwide since its release late last year, making it one of the industry’s hottest-selling games of recent years.

U.S. Takeover Fails to Shutdown Bootleg Web Site

The U.S. Justice Department said on Wednesday it had seized a Web site that offered information on bootlegged video games and movies, but the site remained available to many Internet users.

The Justice Department said it had taken over the Web site (http://www.isonews.com) after its owner pleaded guilty to selling computer chips that would enable users to play bootleg video games on Microsoft Corp. Xbox consoles.

Some visitors to the site found a warning against copyright infringement and a link to the Justice Department’s computer-crime division, but others were able to reach a version of the original site, which serves as a meeting place for Internet users.

A Justice Department spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

The site, which claimed up to 140,000 hits each day, does not contain illegal copies of video games, software and movies, but instead contains message boards where Internet users can trade tips about such "warez," and visitors continued to post messages there early on Wednesday afternoon.

A computer network engineer explained to Reuters that the domain name pointed to at least two numerical Internet addresses, only one of which was controlled by the government. Users would encounter differing versions of the Web site depending on which address was stored by their "name servers," which match domain names to numerical addresses, the engineer said.

According to the Justice Department, David Rocci, 22, agreed to surrender the site after pleading guilty last December to importing 450 Enigmah Mod Chips from Britain and selling them for between $45 and $60 apiece.

Rocci will face a prison sentence of up to five years and fines up to $500,000 at his sentencing on March 7, the government said.

"David Rocci developed a public Web site that specifically catered to the underground piracy community," said Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff. "He attempted to profit by marketing circumvention devices to that community knowing they would be used to play pirated games."

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Jagfest 2003-Thriving in the Jungle

For 2003 Jaguar fans have agreed to hold multiple JagFest events nationwide to allow other fans the opportunity to attend during this historic tenth anniversary of the release of the Jaguar by Atari Corporation.

JagFest 2003 "Thriving in the Jungle" will demonstrate the Jaguar is still alive and kicking with numerous hobby game efforts underway nearly a decade after the Jaguar's first release. Each event will feature demos of lost and upcoming games, as well as one or more tournaments with prizes for some of the best Jaguar games out there.

At this time, the following JagFest events have been established:

JagFest @ MWC

When: June 7, 2003
Where: Milwaukee, WI
Lead Organizers: Dan Iacovelli

JagFest @ VGS

When: July 12, 2003
Where: Lombard, IL
Lead Organizers: Dan Iacovelli

JagFest @ CGE

When: August 9-10, 2003
Where: Las Vegas, NV
Lead Organizers: Carl Forhan and Scott Walters

There's no way these few organizers can accomplish a successful event alone. We need fans to commit to attend to whichever shows they can. We need equipment, unreleased games, demos of upcoming games, tournament prizes, flyers, web pages, and more. If you're interested in organizing a JagFest event in your region, or would like to assist with other established events, please send a blank email to

JagFest-subscribe@yahoogroups.com .

Long live the Jaguar!

Randy Femrite
Carl Forhan
Greg George
Dan Iacovelli
Dan Loosen
Micah Rowe
Scott Walters
Tim Wilson

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Hits Back in Java Case

In the latest round of a corporate boxing match that has persisted for more than five years, Microsoft has filed a court brief accusing Sun Microsystems of unfair competition and violation of a previous settlement agreement. The brief is part of an ongoing private antitrust case brought against Microsoft by Sun.

At issue is Microsoft's freedom to distribute its own version of Java bundled with Windows. Java is a cross-platform programming language that delivers applications to the desktop, sometimes embedded within a Web browser. Sun has claimed that Microsoft's version of the language is incompatible with Sun's version, creating problems for users and violating the Java licensing agreement.

The ongoing antitrust case is the second suit filed over this issue. The original complaint was brought by Sun in October 1997. Just over three years later, in January 2001, Microsoft settled that case by paying Sun US$20 million.

The second lawsuit, heard by U.S. District Judge J. Frederick Motz, is broader in scope. Sun claims Microsoft is attempting to persuade developers to write programs for the .NET platform instead of Java, but the case also includes complaints that Microsoft has refused to export its Office suite to non-Windows operating systems, and that Microsoft is trying to pressure enterprise customers to use its Exchange and SQL Server products.

On January 21st, Motz issued a preliminary injunction ordering Microsoft to remove its proprietary version of Java and begin distributing Sun's version with the Windows operating system. That injunction was quickly put on hold by a circuit court in Richmond, Virginia, to which Microsoft appealed. The appeal will be argued by both sides April 3rd.

But Giga Information Group research fellow Rob Enderle told the E-Commerce Times that there is now an inherent contradiction in Sun's position. By thwarting Microsoft's ability to distribute Java in the first case, then complaining that Microsoft is not using Java enough in the second case, Sun is on untenable ground, according to Enderle. "Microsoft is in a stronger position," he said.

Microsoft's new counterclaim accuses Sun of two violations. First, the software giant alleges that Sun's prosecution goes against California's Business and Professional Code 17200, which stipulates fair business practices. The code supports litigious action against "unfair, unlawful, or fraudulent practice."

Microsoft asserts that Sun has brought the antitrust case "willfully and deliberately with an intent to cause competitive injury to Microsoft and

to aid Microsoft’s competitors." In so doing, according to the brief, Sun is "seeking to relitigate the United States government’s action against Microsoft."

At the same time, Microsoft also is arguing that Sun’s case has breached the 2001 Java settlement terms, depriving Microsoft of "quiet enjoyment" of the technology it licensed under that settlement. According to the software giant, Sun agreed that Microsoft could distribute its own version of the Java Virtual Machine until 2008.

Sun has complained about the method by which Microsoft chose to distribute that technology -- the software giant offered Sun’s Java to Windows XP users as an optional download, rather than bundling it with Windows. Microsoft has countered that Sun had no comment on this arrangement when Microsoft first announced it in July 2001, but instead waited eight months before launching its complaint.

True to the acrimonious spirit between these two arch-rivals, the language of Microsoft’s latest court filing is caustic and contemptuous. The brief refers to "Sun’s technologically inferior Java software" and claims that "Sun [seeks] to obtain a free ride on Microsoft’s success." Pressing the point with deepening scorn, Microsoft declares, "Sun claims that this success -- earned through years of costly research and development -- obligates Microsoft to shore up Sun’s business and compensate Sun for its own failures."

Microsoft also refers to Sun’s complaints as "antitrust epithets."

Asserting a we-can-do-it-better attitude, Microsoft’s litany of insults about Java range from incompatibilities within Sun’s own product to a slam against all cross-platform technologies aimed at the lowest common denominator so that they will work with several operating systems. Specifically, Microsoft claims that Java applications run poorly and consume too much memory.

"Microsoft smells blood, because Sun is stumbling," Yankee Group software analyst Laura DiDio told the E-Commerce Times. However, she added, the two companies are evenly matched on the rhetorical battleground. "Sun has had its pens dipped in acid for longer than Microsoft has."

Microsoft has not specified an amount it seeks in monetary damages. That amount, the company says, should be determined by the court.

Senate OKs Revised ’Virtual’ Child-Porn Ban

The U.S. Senate approved a bill on Monday that would strengthen existing child-pornography laws, aiming to help authorities track down pedophiles on the Internet while avoiding free-speech concerns that derailed a similar law last year.

The Senate voted 84 to 0 to require those charged in child-pornography cases to prove that their material did not depict actual children, making it easier for prosecutors to use computer images as evidence in trials.

The Supreme Court struck down a similar law last April on free-speech grounds, saying it could criminalize legitimate movies that depicted underage sex, like "Romeo and Juliet."

Lawmakers worried that the move would make child-porn cases impossible to prosecute as defendants could claim that any images in question were entirely computer-generated and did not depict real children.

The bill passed by the Senate would shift the burden of proof so defendants in child-pornography cases would have to prove that the material did not depict minors. Most criminal cases in the United States place the burden of proof on prosecutors.

Child pornography has become more widely available over the past decade as pedophiles across the globe sign up for Internet chat groups and visit Web sites with names like "Candyman" and "I Love Older Men."

Producers of adult pornography, a $70 billion business worldwide, would be required to keep records to show that none of their actors are underage and would be prohibited from marketing their products as underage pornography.

The bill, known as the PROTECT Act, also outlaws the sale or trade of child pornography, bans the use of child pornography to entice a minor for sex, and allows victims of child pornography to sue for damages.

Depictions of child sexual intercourse, or adults passing themselves off as children while having sex, would be classified as obscenity and thus stripped of many free-speech protections.

"It goes without saying that we have a compelling interest in protecting our children from harm," said bill sponsor Sen. Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican. "The PROTECT Act strikes a necessary balance between this goal and the First Amendment."

Vermont Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy, who sponsored the bill as well, urged the House of Representatives to take up the bill and pass it promptly.

"Although this bill is not perfect, it is a good-faith effort to provide powerful tools for prosecutors to deal with the problem of child pornography within constitutional limits," Leahy said.

Both the Senate and the House passed child-pornography laws last year, but negotiators could not agree on a common solution and neither one was signed into law.

A spokesman for the House Judiciary Committee said he was not sure when the committee would tackle the issue. The Bush administration said it supported the bill.

California Edging Toward Internet Sales Tax

With a state budget deficit that could hit $35 billion, California Gov. Gray Davis is rethinking his long-standing objection to imposing sales taxes on Internet commerce - a reversal that could ignite similar steps around the nation.

Lawmakers around the nation are increasingly eyeing online revenues to plug shortfalls that could collectively top $50 billion this year and $70 billion next year.

Last year, Internet sales ballooned to $79 billion, or about 3 percent of all retail sales, according to Forrester Research.

California alone may be losing $1.7 billion this year by not taking a deeper cut of Internet sales - which is why two bills to tax Internet sales have been filed in the Legislature.

If either were to pass, the movement to tax Internet sales would gain serious clout, said Utah Tax Commissioner R. Bruce Johnson, a leader of the push.

"It’s difficult to overstate the importance of California’s participation in this project," he said.

A U.S. Supreme Court decision says states cannot force businesses to collect their sales taxes unless the company has a physical presence in that state.

While California stores with online sites faithfully collect sales taxes for the state, most online sellers such as Seattle-based Amazon.com say it’s impossible to collect sales taxes for an estimated 7,500 taxing districts nationally.

But 34 states and the District of Columbia are trying to come up with a simple standard from a hodgepodge of sales tax definitions to persuade Congress to lift a national moratorium against Internet sales taxes. Also, major retailers have agreed on a way to collect Internet sales taxes in 37 states.

So far, California and other states with high-tech and investment sectors - including New York, Colorado, Massachusetts and Georgia - have largely watched from the sidelines.

New York Gov. George Pataki, a Republican, remains opposed to taxing Internet shopping. But Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, also a Republican, has expressed a willingness to examine the issue. The Legislature sent Romney a bill Tuesday that would make Massachusetts join the states working on the issue nationally.

Some frequent online shoppers say they wouldn’t be happy about giving up the sales tax benefit.

"I buy everything online," said Noah Eckhouse of suburban Boston. "My attitude is, I’m a Yankee. A penny saved is a penny earned."

It’s unclear whether other online commerce sites, like auction house eBay, could be included in sales taxes. EBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove notes that some sellers on the site already collect sales tax and says the company is closely monitoring the developments.

In 2000, just months after the Internet bubble burst and tech stocks tumbled, Davis vetoed a bill passed by the California Legislature to require online merchants to collect sales taxes. Davis said it would send the "wrong signal" to a California-based industry transforming the world.

But now, officials like California Controller Steve Westly, a former eBay executive, says it’s time the state reaps sales taxes from the Internet. Westly says Davis is rethinking the issue and asked him for suggestions that could lead to bills Westly hopes will pass this year.

For weeks, Davis spokeswoman Hilary McLean has been saying Davis is open to Internet sales taxes, considering how California's economy and budget have turned for the worse. She also notes Davis' 2000 veto message said the state should revisit the issue in three to five years.

EU Agrees Jail Terms for Computer Hackers

Computer hackers and virus spreaders could be jailed for five years in serious cases under new laws approved by European Union justice ministers on Friday.

Authorities worldwide have woken up to the dangers of serious network failures in key installations such as electricity and water supply. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, concerns have also grown about hackers gaining access to security information.

"There will be common definitions...and sanctions for a number of online criminal activities," said European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs Antonio Vitorino.

The law seeks to harmonize existing national rules in the 15-nation European Union, where there are vast gaps in laws.

The law targets anyone who illegally enters a computer network or server.

It is also aimed against anyone who sends computer viruses such as the infamous "I love you" virus, which caused major information system breakdowns globally in 2000, as well as other types of destructive software such as "worms."

Hacking and spreading viruses, when committed by organized criminals, will be punished with jail terms of no less than two years - and up to five years - under the new law.

Less serious offences could result in jail terms of between one and three years.

Many incidents of hacking are believed to go unreported by companies and government bodies due to the difficulty in tracking the culprits.

One industry hit by organized attacks is online gambling, where hackers have managed to crack servers, corrupt games and rack up winnings worth millions of dollars, according to industry and security experts.

It's Open Season on Spammers

The problem of spam - how to get rid of it, how to track down the senders, and whether to prosecute those spammers - has dominated many discussions at the third annual Privacy and Data Security Summit here this week.

The summit, which has attracted legislators, regulators, and a litany of privacy and data-security experts, carries the theme of "implementing and managing privacy in a complex environment." More than any single topic,

unsolicited commercial e-mail appears to be a major privacy issue for many of the presenters and attendees. A close second are the fairly complex Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act rules, which regulate health information privacy and take effect April 12.

Clearly, spam is on people's minds. Data privacy has become a mainstream concern among the constituents of Representative Cliff Stearns (R-Florida), who made an opening presentation.

"Spam threatens to ruin the only truly killer app in existence: e-mail," said Federal Trade Commissioner Orson Swindle in another presentation. He made an impassioned call for widespread public education about the risks posed by privacy violations--including those made by spammers.

"Spam continues to do major damage to consumer confidence," Swindle said. "This is an abuse problem [caused by] people who delight in flouting the law."

Douglas R. Miller, AOL's executive director of integrity assurance, went further.

"We should be supporting legislation that, frankly, puts spammers behind bars," Miller told a packed room. He participated in a panel discussion entitled "Will E-Mail Survive the Spam Wars?"

"We want to make spamming a crime," Miller added.

But while many here agree that spam causes great difficulties, not all concur that new laws will put an end to it.

"We have achieved more widespread public understanding of privacy practicalities through vigorous debate" than through legislation, Swindle said.

Brian Huseman, an attorney with the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, cautioned against broad rules that could be unwieldy. For example, it might seem appropriate to require businesses to alert customers every time a privacy breach is detected, no matter how small the potential risk to consumers.

"The cost of notifying 8 million customers [over a possibly trivial breach] - and the panic that can cause among consumers--points to the risk of blunderbuss legislation that tries to address all circumstances, including those that may change over time," Huseman said.

Others noted that many spammers already ignore state laws restricting spam, and are unlikely to be intimidated by similar federal legislation.

In fact, a blow in one privacy battle might stoke another skirmish, said Bruce Johnson, a technology lawyer. The fallout of the FTC's Do Not Call lists, which will restrict who telemarketers can contact, "might be more spam," Johnson said. "Advertisers might move [from the phone] to the unregulated medium of spam" to promote their messages.

Plugging spam at the network level has potential, several attendees suggested.

"The way to ensure privacy is to make sure it's built into [Internet] systems, in the same ways generally accepted accounting principles are built into accounting systems," said David Stampley, an assistant U.S.

attorney general.

In fact, squashing spam has been named a priority by several leading ISPs, including America Online and Microsoft.

If the industry doesn't adequately attack the problem, the issue could become a regulatory matter, warned the FTC's Swindle.

"If [businesses] don't make privacy and security part of the corporate culture, the FTC will be a part of your future," Swindle said.

Congress is also eyeing the issue, Stearns noted. "In a civilized world, privacy is very important," he said.

Lovgate.C Worm Crawls Across Web

Antivirus vendors are warning of a worm with high damage potential spreading across the Internet, with initial outbreaks Monday in Europe and Asia.

The Lovgate.C worm, a variant of an earlier worm with the same name, propagates itself by replying to e-mail in a user's in-box with an attachment containing the bad code, according to Trend Micro, among the first to release alerts about the pest. The worm then installs a backdoor port that allows a remote user to access and modify files on an infected user's system.

The self-replicating worm spreads through network shared folders and subfolders, as well as through the traditional method of an unsuspecting user's clicking on an e-mail attachment.

The worm is primarily affecting users of Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express e-mail programs. It can propagate itself through Outlook e-mail, but recipients may be users of any e-mail program.

Trend Micro representatives say the virus disguises itself as legitimate e-mail by replying to an existing e-mail message in your in-box, not simply by drawing on addresses in your address box.

The company provided an example of a legitimate e-mail message sent to an infected user, concerning something business related, that is answered by the worm with the message, "I'll try to respond as soon as possible. Take a look to [sic] the attachment and send me your opinion!" Users will often click on this attachment, since it appears to come from a person they know, Trend Micro said.

Clicking on the attachment sends the malicious code into several executable files on a user's system. It resides in a PC's system folder under any of several names, including WinRpcsrv.e, syshelp.exe, winrpc.exe, WinGate.exe, and rpcsrv.exe, according to Trend Micro.

Security tools vendor McAfee, a division of Network Associates, notes that the worm attaches itself to an e-mail message using one of several innocuous-sounding names, including fun.exe, images.exe, news_doc.exe, pics.exe, setup.exe, joke.exe, card.exe, and others.

Trend Micro and other leading vendors of antivirus programs, including

Symantec and McAfee, have classified Lovgate.C as a medium-risk worm. All have updated the definitions in their antivirus products to detect and eradicate the newest worm.

TrendMicro has issued a report on the virus, along with prevention information.

Symantec, which markets Norton Antivirus, has also posted an alert for the Lovgate worm. The company says this variant has no major differences in functionality from the W32.HLLW.Lovgate@mm worm, and appears to have been recompiled with a different compiler.

McAfee, a division of Network Associates, has also posted a virus profile and updated its definition software to combat the new worm.

BitDefender has posted a free removal tool for the Lovgate family of viruses.

The worm exploits a known vulnerability, says the company, which markets security software and services. BitDefender says the worm also spreads under the name Win32.LovGate.C@mm.

Are the Feds Reading Your E-Mail?

Senators from both parties are accusing the FBI of excessive secrecy and demanding details of how federal agents use antiterrorist laws to spy on people’s Internet activity. The Domestic Surveillance Oversight Act is called "the first comprehensive, public FBI oversight effort in decades" by cosponsor Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont. He is teaming with Republican Senators Charles Grassley of Iowa and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania to force greater accountability by investigative agencies. All three are members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Their legislation requires FBI and Department of Justice agents to tell how often they spy on American citizens, under powers granted by the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and expanded in the Patriot Act of 2001.

The demand for a report on how the DOJ and FBI use those broader surveillance powers comes as the investigators apparently seek even more authority.

"Before we give the government more power to conduct surveillance on its own citizens, we must look at how it is using the power that it already has," says Leahy. "Is that power being used effectively, so that our citizens not only feel safer but are in fact safer? Is that power being used appropriately, so that our liberties are not sacrificed?"

He says cities across the country have sent "clear signals" to Washington by debating or passing resolutions urging Congress to ensure a proper balance between civil liberties and government’s police and surveillance powers. Last session, two senators called for an oversight commission to balance security and privacy.

Both the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and the Patriot Act expanded federal agents’ access to electronic surveillance. Under the surveillance act, investigators need only convince a special Foreign Intelligence

Surveillance Court that the proposed spying target is an "agent of foreign power" as opposed to demonstrating probable cause that the individual is involved in criminal activity. The Patriot Act, rushed through Congress shortly after the 9/11 attacks, expands the powers afforded by FISA.

The Senate bill introduced Tuesday would require the attorney general to issue an annual report showing how often FISA orders were issued for U.S. citizens. It also asks how often agents monitor library computers, how they use FISA provisions in criminal court cases, and how FISA courts interpret search applications.

The DOJ calls the senators' criticism unfair.

The DOJ says it and related agencies have reported on their investigations to Congress dozens of times since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Attorney General John Ashcroft, FBI Director Robert Mueller, and other senior Justice Department officials have provided more than 140 briefings for Congress on FISA, terrorism, and FBI reorganization, the DOJ says.

The agency also cites a comment by Royce Lamberth, former presiding judge of the FISA court. "We consistently find [FISA] applications well-scrubbed by the attorney general and his staff before they are presented to us. The process is working," the DOJ quotes Lamberth as saying.

With the bill, the senators released a 37-page report. It says the FBI and DOJ are excessively secret and inadequately trained with respect to FISA provisions. Specter says the incompetence goes "straight to the top," saying Mueller and his deputies cannot clearly define FISA standards and say what denotes "probable cause" to get warrants from a FISA court.

Grassley even says the terrorist attacks could have been averted if the FBI's top FISA lawyer, Marion Bowman, had granted an August 2001 request to search the PC of Zacarias Moussaoui, allegedly the 20th hijacker. Grassley says Moussaoui's computer housed a "virtual blueprint" of the attacks. Last year, Bowman received a Presidential Rank Award, which commands a bonus of 20 percent of his salary.

The senators also accuse the FBI of stifling internal criticism and oversight. They say FBI Unit Chief John Roberts was passed up for promotion after decrying a lack of accountability in the bureau's upper levels in a CBS 60 Minutes interview.

"The lesson at the FBI still is, 'If you mess up--do something wrong--you get promoted and you get an award. But if you speak the truth, like Roberts did, all you get is just a lot of trouble,'" Grassley says. "The result is an atmosphere of fear where no one knows which way is up or how basic legal standards might apply."

The DOJ and FBI are already under similar fire from privacy rights groups nationwide.

Last fall, a federal court ordered the DOJ to answer a Freedom of Information request by the Electronic Privacy Information Center and the American Civil Liberties Union asking how often federal agents spy on Internet users, and how they are trained to do so.

"Disclosure of basic information about FISA surveillance is not going to hamper our antiterrorism efforts," says Timothy Edgar, an ACLU lawyer. "What it will do--as is evidenced by broad support in Congress - is go a

long way toward assuaging growing public mistrust of the government."

The ACLU and EPIC are appealing the Justice Department's response, saying the 200 pages of documents were mostly repeated or blacked-out e-mails.

Hershey, Mrs. Fields Settle FTC Web Privacy Charges

Candy maker Hershey Foods Corp. and cookie baker Mrs. Fields Original Cookies Inc. agreed to pay $185,000 to settle charges that they collected personal information from children without their parents' permission, U.S. regulators said on Thursday.

The Federal Trade Commission charged that both companies violated an online privacy law because they did not ensure that they had parental permission before collecting the names, e-mail addresses, ages and other personal information of children who visited their Web sites.

Mrs. Fields agreed to pay $100,000 and Hershey's Foods agreed to pay $85,000 to settle the charges. Neither company admitted guilt as part of the settlement.

Privately held Mrs. Fields, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, encouraged children 12 and under to sign up for a free cookie or pretzel on their birthday, but did not obtain proper parental consent when it collected children's' names, addresses, birthdays and e-mail addresses, according to the FTC.

Hershey, based in Hershey, Pennsylvania, instructed children under 13 to have their parents fill out an online consent form on many of its Web sites, the FTC said, but took no steps to ensure that parents actually did fill out the forms.

Neither company notified parents that it was collecting information from their children, the FTC alleged, or accurately disclosed how it would use that information.

"These settlements offer food for thought for anyone who operates a Web site that caters to kids," said Howard Beales, head of the FTC's consumer-protection division.

Both companies also agreed to delete the customer lists they set up through their Web sites and allow the FTC to monitor their activities in the future.

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, passed in 1998, sets penalties of $11,000 per violation.

Roxio Aims to Start Napster Subscriptions

Napster, the pioneering online music service, is getting another lease on life with the launch by year's end of a legal, subscription-based music business, its new owners said Monday.

Roxio Inc., which bought Napster's name and intellectual property for $5

million at a November bankruptcy sale, said it is in discussions with the five major music labels to provide content for the online service.

Best known for its CD-creation and digital media software, Roxio also hired Napster founder Shawn Fanning this month as a consultant to the service, said spokeswoman Kathryn Kelly.

But the new Napster won't be based on the famous file-swapping technology that, boasting 60 million users at its height, upset the record labels and doomed the company in a sea of copyright infringement litigation.

"Before it launches, it will have to be legal," Kelly said. "And it will be top-tier content, not unheard-of bands you see now with most of the subscription services."

The old Napster, which halted the free file-swapping frenzy in July 2001, was planning to launch its own subscription service. But the company liquidated before that service was publicly launched.

Much of the problem in launching the legal service stemmed from the old company's poor relationship with the major labels, which were suing at the same time Napster was trying to strike distribution deals.

Though Roxio will keep the well-known Napster name, it hopes its negotiations will go farther since it is unencumbered by the litigation, Kelly said.

Also, Chris Gorog, who became Roxio's chief executive in 2000, was previously an executive at Universal Studios.

"Chris has the relationships with the entertainment industry," Kelly said. "The record labels know we want to do this the correct way and the legal way."

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